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## CONTENTS

- 4 THE NEW ISOLATIONISM: An Interview with Murray Rothbard and Leonard Liggio
- 20 SOCIETY WITHOUT GOVERNMENT: A 20th Century Example / Aslam Effendi
- 23 KNOWLEDGE, CONTROL, AND OWNERSHIP / Douglas Den Uyl
- 27 MONEY: Free Money and Other Problems / Davis E. Keeler
- 28 FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: Argentina / N. Guillermo Molinelli
- 29 PUBLISHER'S NOTES
- 31 MOVIES: Travels with My Aunt; Play It As It Lays; Snowball Express; Jeremiah Johnson / Charles Barr
- 32 RUDEBARBS / Randall K. Hylkema
- 32 REASON PROFILE: Tibor R. Machan
- 33 TRENDS
- 34 LETTERS
- 38 CLASSIFIEDS

the new

# isolationism

## An Interview with Murray Rothbard and Leonard Liggio

*Although most libertarians are in substantial agreement on fundamental premises which recognize the right of an individual to his life and property, and the right to be free from the initiation of force, in the application of such principles there is sometimes disagreement and blind spots among libertarians. Particularly this is true in the area of foreign policy. Thus, for example, the Libertarian Party—at the same time that it explicitly opposes “all interference by government in the areas of voluntary and contractual relationships among individuals” and recognizes that “men should not be forced to sacrifice their lives and property for the benefit of others”—also takes a stand in favor of military alliances with countries “whose continued free existence is vital to the protection of the freedom of all American citizens” and asserts that “we should have a sufficient nuclear capacity to convince any potential aggressor that it cannot hope to survive a first strike against the United States.” To the extent that libertarianism is founded on a defense of individual rights, is it possible to reconcile the collective security/nuclear defense positions taken by the Libertarian Party? Or should libertarians espouse a noninterventionist foreign policy—with isolationism and neutrality as its watchwords?*

*In this month's exclusive REASON interview, two of the leading theoreticians of the libertarian movement discuss the implications of libertarianism in the area of foreign policy. Dr. Murray N. Rothbard and Leonard Liggio were interviewed by REASON while they were in Los Angeles last June. Dr. Rothbard's name is, of course, well known to REASON readers. Widely recognized as one of the leading libertarian scholars, Dr. Rothbard is Professor of Economics at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. He received his Ph.D. in Economics from Columbia University, and he has authored MAN, ECONOMY AND STATE (1962), THE PANIC OF 1819 (1963), AMERICA'S GREAT DEPRESSION (1963), and POWER & MARKET (1970), as well as numerous other books and articles. Dr. Rothbard's latest book, FOR A NEW LIBERTY will be published this spring by The MacMillan Company and portions of it will be pre-printed next month in REASON.*

*Leonard Liggio is an instructor in history at City College, City University of New York. A leading revisionist historian, Liggio received his degrees from Georgetown and Fordham. He has contributed chapters to COLD WAR CRITICS (1971) and THE NEW HISTORY OF LEVIATHAN (1972) and has also published in various periodicals.*

*Liggio and Rothbard are close friends and have together contributed much that is new and significant in terms of serious revisionist scholarship. Both of them were strongly influenced by Ludwig von Mises, foremost exponent of the Austrian School of Economics, who taught for many years at New York University's Graduate School of Business Administration. Both Rothbard and Liggio were coeditors of the significant journal of libertarian thought, LEFT AND RIGHT, which was published from 1965 through 1968. Rothbard presently is editor of THE LIBERTARIAN FORUM, a monthly newsletter, and it has recently been reported to REASON that a Rothbard-for-Mayor booklet is developing in New York City among libertarian political activists.*

*By the time of the election last November, Rothbard shifted from his reluctant endorsement of McGovern—which he expressed in the interview—to a pro-Nixon position. Up to then a life-long anti-Nixonite, Rothbard told REASON before the election that he finally swung against McGovern because of two factors: “the horrendous McGovern economics-compulsory egalitarianism, and the quota system thinking, which also is of course an egalitarian doctrine, and which is so dangerous it should be scotched immediately.”*

*REASON editor Manuel S. Klausner, who also studied under Mises at NYU, interviewed Rothbard and Liggio in the Klausner home in Los Angeles. Commencing at midnight, following a leisurely bout of wining and dining, the interview offers many new insights for those libertarians who have been misguided by Cold War-nationalistic-right wing rhetoric in the area of foreign policy. Libertarian wives, Joey Rothbard and Willette Klausner were also in attendance during the interview.*



*Rothbard (left) and Liggio (right)  
in Rothbard's New York City apartment.*

**REASON:** First of all, if you could briefly describe, Murray, what is the role that you have played in the Libertarian movement during your career.

**ROTHBARD:** Well, I was there longer than most people. I started out as a laissez-faire Libertarian in about 1946 or 1947. By the winter of '50, I advanced from support of government limited to defense—by compelling logic—to anarcho capitalism. This makes some 26 years in the movement, and I have been working hard at it ever since, I guess that explains part of it.

**REASON:** Let me ask, Leonard, if you could briefly summarize what your role has been in the Libertarian movement.

**LIGGIO:** I had a long interest in isolationism starting with the period before the Second World War, especially during 1940 and 1941, in which I observed with great interest and cheered on the Isolationist movement. I continued to give complete support during the darkest days of the Isolationist movement—during the period of World War II, when Isolationism was subjected to a vast amount of persecution culminating in the famous Sedition trials of 1944, in which Laurence Dennis and other important figures played an important part. And then there was a great renaissance of Isolationist thought during the post World War II period in which there was the famous fight against the Truman foreign policies that occurred in the Congress led by the Mid Western Isolationists—especially Howard Buffett and George Bender in the House of Representatives and Kenneth Wherry and Robert Taft in the Senate.

This led me to active involvement in activities

**LIGGIO:** "Isolationism is the practical application of Libertarianism in the realm of foreign policy."

**ROTHBARD:** "The Libertarian position is to minimize State power as much as possible down to zero, and isolationism is the full expression of the domestic objective of whittling down State power and minimizing it."

supporting Isolationists in their opposition to the Korean war, and finally culminating in the campaign for Senator Taft's nomination in the 1952 Presidential Campaign and the great climactic struggle between the forces of collective security represented by Dwight Eisenhower in the Republican Party and Adlai Stevenson in the Democratic Party on the one hand, both of whom had the same supporters even though they were two separate political parties, and then the Isolationists led by Senator Taft standing outside of this grouping that worked together for the nominations of Eisenhower and of Stevenson. With the loss of the Taft campaign it became clear that something much more rigorous, much more well defined was necessary than the traditional Republican Isolationism, and at that point the impact of the ideas of laissez-faire became very important and I was introduced to the ideas of Professor Ludwig von Mises by Ralph Raico, who was also a fellow co-worker in the campaign of the Youth for Taft in the 1952 campaign.

At that point, the modified laissez-faire ideas then became rigorously-applied and it was clear that the ideas of Professor von Mises drawn to the logical conclusion meant anarchism; and in that process, being located at that time in the City of Washington, I had the good fortune to be associated with the great teacher of Libertarianism, Frank Chodorov [author of *ONE IS A CROWD*] who had been so long associated with Albert Jay Nock [author of *OUR ENEMY, THE STATE* and *JEFFERSON*], and who had carried the banner of Libertarianism for many dark years, especially in publication of the journal *ANALYSIS* and then later *HUMAN EVENTS*—under the old style of *HUMAN EVENTS*, which had been founded by Felix Morley—and then through the various processes of reading and observing political

developments and through the Mises seminar which became the focal point for all the further development of Libertarian ideas.

All the younger people began in the mid-1950s to attend the Mises seminar at New York University and at that point came into contact with the preeminent heir of Professor von Mises, Murray Rothbard, and after that history began.

**REASON:** Would you identify, Leonard, the Isolationist views of Taft with a Libertarian foreign policy?

**LIGGIO:** Isolationism is the practical application of Libertarianism in the realm of foreign policy, and the close interrelationship between Libertarianism and Isolationism is evident if one has any sense of the history of both of these movements in American history in the 20th century.

The leading personalities associated with Libertarianism would be people such as Albert Jay Nock especially, and Randolph Bourne and also Henry Mencken and Oswald Garrison Villard. These were important and intellectual figures in the immediate period before World War I, who became central figures in protesting in World War I, suffering if they were in academic posts by being expelled from university teaching or, in the case of journalism, suffering for their opposition to the war.

This was true of Nock especially who, as the chief editorial writer for Villard's *NATION*, saw the magazine confiscated by the American government on the grounds that Nock's editorials criticized Samuel Gompers as the President of the American Federation of Labor, on the basis that Gompers was acting as the bagman for the American Government in buying off European labor in order to keep their support for American foreign policy in World War I. And immediately after World War I began, Nock arranged for the publication of Francis Neilson's book *HOW DIPLOMATS MAKE WAR*, and he himself brought out, first in his journal *THE FREEMAN*, and then as a book, *THE MYTH OF THE GUILTY NATION*, his own writings on American foreign policy showing the responsibility of the United States for entry into World War I in 1917. This was followed by Harry Elmer Barnes' monumental work *THE GENESIS OF THE WORLD WAR*, which followed up on Nock's position, which showed not only that the United States entered World War I on its own volition, but also that the responsibility of the war was primarily that of those powers which clustered around the Allied side—Serbia, Czarist Russia, France, and England—rather than Germany and Austria and Hungary.

This constellation of Isolationist forces, many of whom were principal spokesmen for Libertarianism,

was the intellectual vanguard for the fight against collective security in 1919, for the prevention of American entry into the League of Nations, and the defeat of the horrendous and vicious Versailles Treaty. And the leadership of this group politically in the Senate was in the hands of Senator William Borah of Idaho who led the famous Battalion of Death—the great Isolationist group in the Senate, which included the two LaFollettes, and later Wheeler, Nye, Langer, and finally Taft.

In the years between 1920 and 1940, you found a flowering of Isolationist writings in close proximity to the flowering of Libertarian ideas, especially in the hands of Albert J. Nock. And then with the beginnings of World War II the great purge of the Isolationists occurred—the purge of Oswald Garrison Villard, from the *NATION*, the purge of John Flynn, the brilliant critic of the warfare state from the *NEW REPUBLIC*, the purge of Harry Elmer Barnes as editorial writer and columnist for the Scripps-Howard papers, and the imposition of what Harry Elmer Barnes has so accurately described as the "historical blackout" and the forcing of Isolationist Libertarian spokesmen into what can easily be described as an underground during World War II, when the pressures that I earlier described in terms of the trials were used as an attempt by the Government to pressure all to silence—all Isolationist Libertarians. But with the end of the war, the possibility then of the emergence of this kind of criticism—in which the more obvious development of foreign policy dominating American affairs, especially in the postwar world, in the Cold War—was able to attract large numbers of people. Then many of these people went on to the logical conclusions of Isolationism, i.e., anarchism.

**REASON:** Let me ask, Murray, if you would give a brief statement of your view of Isolationism as an essential tenet of Libertarian foreign policy.

**ROTHBARD:** I think the Libertarian position, generally, is to minimize State power as much as possible down to zero and Isolationism is the full expression of the domestic objective of whittling down State power and minimizing it. In other words, interventionism is the opposite of isolationism which of course goes on up to war, as the aggrandizement of State power crosses national boundaries into other States, other countries, pushing other people around etc. so this is the foreign counterpart, so to speak, of the domestic aggression against the internal population. I see the two as united in the sense that Libertarians wish to limit or abolish domestic State intervention.

The responsibility of wishing to abolish or limit foreign intervention is avoided by many Conservative Libertarians in that they are very, very concerned with things like price control—of course I agree with

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them—they are very, very concerned about eliminating taxes, licensing and so forth—with which I agree—but somehow when it comes to foreign policy there's a blackout: the Libertarian passion against the State, the hostility toward expanding Government intervention and so forth, goes by the board—all of a sudden you hear those same people who are worried about Government intervention in the steel industry or something cheering on every American act of mass murdering in Viet Nam or bombing or pushing around people all over the world. Somehow they don't link the domestic state to the foreign state—the foreign policy of the State—it's a very peculiar situation. It shows, for one thing, that the mystification powers of the State—that starts with the powers of the State apparatus to bamboozle the public—work better in foreign affairs than they do in domestic. In foreign affairs you still have this mystique that the nation-State is protecting you from a bad bogeyman behind the other side of the mountain. There are "bad" guys out there out to conquer the world and "our" guys are in there trying to protect them. So not only is this the logical corollary of Libertarianism which many Libertarians don't put into practice; in addition to that, as Randolph Bourne says, "war is the health of the State."

The State thrives on war—unless of course it is defeated and crushed—apart from that, the State thrives on war, expands on it, glories in it. For one thing, when one State attacks another State, once they get in a war against another State, a State is able through this intellectual bamboozlement of the public to convince them that they must rush to the defense of the State because they think the State is defending *them*. In other words, if let's say, take a deliberately trivial example: if Paraguay and Brazil are going to get into a war, each State—the Paraguayan Government and the Brazilian Government—is able to convince their own subjects that the other Government is out to get them and somehow loot them and murder them in their beds and so forth, so they are able to induce their own hapless subjects to defend themselves against the foreigner—against the other State—whereas in actual practice, of course, it is the States that have the quarrel, not the people. The people are outside the quarrels of the State and yet the State is able to generate this patriotic mass war hysteria and to call everybody up to the colors both physically and spiritually and economically and therefore, of course, aggrandize State power permanently.

Most Conservatives and Libertarians are very familiar with—and deplore all the time—the increase in State power in the American Government in the last 50 or 70 years, but what they don't seem to realize is that

most of these increases took place in giant leaps during wartime. It was wartime that provided the crisis situation—the spark—which enabled the States to put on so-called "emergency" measures, which of course never got lifted—or rarely got lifted.

Even the war of 1812—as we look back on the war of 1812 it was a harmless little escapade—but even the war of 1812 was evil, and also in the domestic sense, in that it imposed and ruined the Jeffersonian Party for a long time to come, it established Federalism which means monopoly State-capitalism in essence, it imposed a central bank, it imposed high tariffs, it imposed domestic federal taxation which never existed before, internal taxation, and it took them a long time to get rid of it and we never really did get back to the pre-War of 1812 level of minimal State power—limited Governmental power. That was bad enough. Then, of course, the Mexican war had consequences of slave expansion and so forth. But the Civil War was of course much greater—the Civil War was really the great turning point, one of the great turning points in the increase of State power, because with the Civil War you now have the total introduction of things like railroad land grants, subsidies of big business, permanent high tariffs, which the Jacksonians had been able to whittle away before the Civil War, and a total revolution in the monetary system so that the old pure gold standard was replaced first by greenback paper, and then by the National Banking Act—a controlled banking system—and for the first time the imposition in the United States of an income tax and federal conscription. The income tax was reluctantly eliminated after the Civil War as was conscription; all the other things—high excise taxes on liquor and whisky and cigarettes—most of these things continued on again as a permanent accession of State power over the American public.

The third huge increase of power came out of World War I. World War I set both the foreign and the domestic policies for the twentieth century. Woodrow Wilson set the entire pattern for the entire foreign policy from 1917 to the present. There is a total continuity between Wilson, Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman and Johnson and Nixon—the same thing all the way down the line.

**REASON:** You'd include Kennedy in that?

**ROTHBARD:** Yes Kennedy, right. I don't want to miss anybody. Every President has been inspired by Woodrow Wilson. It was reported that the first act Richard Nixon did when he came into the White House was to put a picture of Woodrow Wilson in



front of him on his desk. The same influence has held on domestic affairs. As a matter of fact if I had to single out—this is one of my favorites pastimes—the biggest S.O.B.s in American history in the sense of S.O.B. impact—of evil impact—I think Woodrow Wilson was way, way at the head of the list for many reasons. The permanent direction which Woodrow Wilson set for foreign policy included the permanent collective security concept, which means America has some sort of God-given role to push everybody around everywhere and set up little democratic governments all over the world, and to suppress any kind of revolution against the status quo—that means any kind of change in the status quo either domestic or foreign. In the domestic sphere the corollary was the shift from a relatively laissez-faire economy—corrupted as it was by the Civil War subsidies it was still and all a relatively laissez-faire capitalism—a deliberate shift from that to what is in essence a so-called corporate state—which openly became a corporate state in Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany.

**REASON:** As of what point in time would you say?

**ROTHBARD:** Well, it started—well the Progressive period begins around 1900 with Teddy Roosevelt and so forth. Woodrow Wilson cements it with his so-called reforms and administration which totally subjects the banking system to federal power, the Federal Trade Commission which totally did for business what the Interstate Commerce Commission did for the railroads, and what the Federal Reserve System did for banking, in other words imposed a system of monopoly capitalism, or corporate state monopoly, which we now call the partnership of the Government and of big business and industry, which means essentially a corporate state or we can call it

economic Fascism. It culminated in World War I economic planning, for the war consisted of a totally collectivized economy headed by the sainted and revered Bernard Mannes Baruch, head of the War Industries Board. The economy had a central Board and each industry was governed by a committee from the industry—say the iron and steel industry was governed by the Iron and Steel Board, the heads of the Board were deliberately selected from the biggest firms in that particular industry and they would negotiate with committees of industry set up by the Government, and the Government would encourage trade associations in the industries to set up committees and negotiate with these Boards. So what you have is the so-called commodity sections—in other words the Government Boards which were selected from the biggest business men in the industry—and the fixed prices and production and priority and everything else with other Committees set up by the same big firms—you know as long as your left hand was talking to your right hand, and everyone loved it. The big businesses loved it, the Government loved it and the Progressive intellectuals—as they were called then—saw in this a magnificent third way—"middle way" as they called it—to battle the old laissez-faire capitalism on the one hand, and the new proletarian Marxian socialism on the other. They didn't like the idea of Marxian socialism because it was messy, emphasized class struggle, and led to a revolution perhaps. What they saw here was a new order—and this was a vision held by Baruch and Hoover and all sorts of progressive intellectuals from the universities and so forth—they saw a beautiful new order with big government controlling the economy, regulating it, subsidizing it, largely staffed by big business men in collaboration with unions which were deliberately encouraged as disciplinary agents for the labor force, and which were practically created by the war labor system. All this of course was staffed and apologized for by the Progressive intellectuals, who acquired prestige, power and a great sense of accomplishment pushing people around in their Government bureaus.

So we have, then, this unholy partnership of big Government, big business, big unions and intellectuals, and it was developed so much in World War I planning that the business leaders and the Government leaders who pushed the thing were very reluctant to see it end, for they saw in it not just a wartime measure—this is the model they wanted to see for the permanent peacetime economy, this is what they really wanted, they wanted to end all messy competition. As one big business writer said, "As General Sherman said 'war is hell, competition is war and therefore competition is hell.'" They wanted to eliminate competition, and to establish a system of industrial "cooperation" monopoly. And they were very sorry to see the War Industries Board scrapped when the war was over. As a matter of fact, it almost wasn't scrapped—Wilson finally decided to scrap it,

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but it was touch and go, and then afterwards the same people—Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, Bernard Baruch, all the people who had earned their stripes in World War I mobilization planning for the rest of their lives tried and then succeeded in reestablishing World War I planning—it was known as war collectivism—as a permanent peacetime set up. Herbert Hoover during the 1920's was trying to use the power of the Government to encourage and support trade association cartel agreements, and Franklin Roosevelt also. When Roosevelt and The New Deal got in, they used not only the same agencies as World War I collectivism, but the same people. In case after case the people were brought back to do for the economy as it was done in war—to treat the depression in a military manner, and then World War II, of course, finishes it. In World War II, we have another big quantum leap—enormous government spending and military-industrial pump priming, and the permanent cold war, and so we then have the plans for a permanent peacetime welfare-warfare state—a corporate state—pushed through of course by partnership of these powerful forces plus intellectuals but done by means of wartime crisis.

**REASON:** Well, what about the Korean war, what role did that play?

**LIGGIO:** The Korean war was important because it came at a time when there was a growing Isolationist movement. It was a movement which was able to focus a good deal of opposition to Government policies, some of which had been focused on domestic programs of the Truman administration and then was focused on the foreign policy—starting with the expansion of the role of the United States in international financial situations, the international monetary fund, the expansion of the Import-Export Bank, the use of the large-scale loans to Great Britain in 1946, the Greek-Turkish aid program of 1947, the Marshall Plan, the NATO, the implementations of NATO, and then finally the intervention by United States in the Korean War in 1950. And the opposition to that war took the form of increased analysis of why the war was occurring and what the issues were in the war. This led to clarification of the ideas that the Libertarians had with regard to foreign policy, which in turn aided their analysis of policy of the Government in general, leading to a much more rigorous Libertarian policy with regard to domestic as well as foreign policy. As the Korean war continued and became more crisis laden, the people who became Libertarians were moved to Libertarianism by the pressure of events, which caused them to do much more reading—to read the history of American foreign policy on the one hand with a great deal more

depth and, on the other hand, to understand the nature of the American political and economic system by more careful reading of the developing literature with regard to the economy, including the very important work by Friedrich Hayek, *THE ROAD TO SERFDOM*, and then taking off from there to read the works by Von Mises—*HUMAN ACTION*, *SOCIALISM*, *BUREAUCRACY*, *PLANNED CHAOS*, etc.—and the work of F. A. Harper, *LIBERTY: A PATH TO ITS RECOVERY* and *IN SEARCH OF PEACE*.

**REASON:** When you speak in terms, Leonard, of reading the history of American foreign policy with more depth, are you referring in particular to the works of the revisionist historians or do you have any other thing in mind?

**LIGGIO:** Yes I'm referring to the works of the revisionist historians which first of all appeared in articles in regard to World War II and the period following World War II, and then finally began to appear in book form. The earliest study dealing with the origins of World War II was the pamphlet which was written by the late William L. Neumann called *THE ROAD TO PEARL HARBOR*, which Neumann wrote while he was in a Conscientious Objector camp during World War II and which was published by the American Friends Service Committee in the spring of 1945. This was followed by other studies by Neumann and by Harry Elmer Barnes especially editing *PERPETUAL WAR FOR PERPETUAL PEACE* which was published in the early 1950's by Caxton publishers, in Idaho. And the most important, probably, of that period, the work by Charles Beard—the two volumes dealing with President Roosevelt and the Second World War, which contained an important concluding chapter outlining the prospects for increased interventionism as a result of World War II: that the expansion of presidential power would lead to future attempts by the executive branch of the American government to use foreign policy as its means of aggrandizing power in the domestic sphere. This was followed by the important work by Charles C. Tansill, *BACK DOOR TO WAR*. So that you have the continuity by the historians associated with the American Old Right of the tradition that they had already established in the 1920's and the 1930's of being the principal and outstanding critics of American foreign policy—except that in the period after World War II, they encountered a vast amount of hostility resulting from a well organized attempt to prevent the public from being in a position to know this information by those who felt that the collective security system which had been proposed at the end of World War I was undermined by the revisionist

historians and scholars who had revealed the reality about the origins of the First World War. What occurred, therefore, was that the people who wanted to provide the framework for a collective security system after World War II organized themselves and undertook a careful campaign to prevent the public from being able to discover the facts about that the responsibility of the United States in the origins of the Second World War.

**REASON:** Leonard, may I ask briefly what do you mean by the Old Right in the context of your prior statement?

**LIGGIO:** The Old Right was that group in American political history which emerged at the end of World War I—emerged as critics of the expansion of domestic power of the American State and as critics of the expansion of American power with regard to foreign policy. These were the people who were the Isolationists, who criticized the whole concept and system of collective security and then carried this criticism through the 20's and 30's into World War II and joined to that a strong critique of the New Deal domestic policies which they saw as part and parcel of the interventionism abroad applied as interventionism at home. The Old Right was characterized by strong commitment to limited Government—to strong limitation on the power of the executive in foreign and domestic affairs, and to a critique of the increase of taxing power which the federal government received as a result of the 16th amendment.

**REASON:** The notion of collective security is something that many Americans today take for granted as something that's desirable and essential. Murray, I'd like you to comment on what your view is of the desirability of a policy of collective security.

**ROTHBARD:** Well I think the concept of collective security is (1) a disaster and (2) anti-Libertarian. Viet Nam again brings this thing to the fore, in the sense of masking Imperial interventionist policy on the part of the American government in the rhetoric of the cloak of righteousness and moralistic pieties. The theory is that—let's take for example two hypothetical states—this is the technique Von Mises used to use, I think, with good effect—take the hypothetical states of Ruritania and Waldavia, somewhere off the Balkans or whatever. The Ruritanian State invades the Waldavian State. The collective-security view is that this constitutes aggression, it's evil per se—an evil state per se attacking a victim state, the Ruritanian State being the aggressor in this case and then it becomes the duty of every other State in the whole wide world—the United States being somehow the divinely appointed chief and almost sole pourer out of resources in this effort—to step in to defend the victim—so-called victim, and crush the aggressor. Now this has very many important consequences. One

is that every crumby little interstate conflict anywhere in the world becomes escalated and maximized into world wide global conflict. With this kind of policy it means that no dispute anywhere, however trivial, can ever be kept trivial or kept isolated to the parties of the dispute, as they become globalized and bring everybody else into the holocaust. The second problem is that the whole idea of the aggressor state and the victim state is based on the phony analogy of the individual citizen-individual person-suffering an aggression against him.

You mentioned the Korean war; you remember the big argument President Truman used about Korea—he said, "We are not engaged in a war, we are engaged in a police action, a U.N. police action against the North Korean aggressor." Now when he said that he was not just using peculiar phony rhetoric, he was not doing that. The point is the rhetoric came out of the Wilsonian collective security ideology, which was: if you see armies crossing frontiers or somewhere, this constitutes aggression. It means that in the same sense as if I see Jones beating up Smith on the street, the policeman on the block rushes to his defense, and so therefore the United States and the United Nations become the policemen rushing to defend the victim. Now there are several problems in this. One is that even in the case of Jones and Smith, the presumption is if you see Jones beating up Smith that you should rush to Smith's defense. However, there might be certain mitigating circumstances. Smith might have just beaten up Jones's kid, and Jones might be retaliating; in other words, Smith might have started the fight—you don't know that without historical investigation so to speak of the Smith-Jones relationship. In the case of states, you have a completely different situation because this ideology assumes that



*"The Old Right was that group in American political history which, at the end of World War I, emerged as critics of the expansion of domestic power of the American State and as critics of the expansion of American power with regard to foreign policy."*

the Waldavian State and Ruritanian State are somehow the rightful owners of all their territory, just as Jones owns his own clothes or his own watch and Smith does, too, and then Smith beats Jones up or takes his watch away from him, and this is aggression. The analogy then becomes well, if Ruritania invades Waldavia, this means that Waldavian territory, Waldavian property, rightful property, has been taken away from them by the Ruritanian aggressor.

Now the point is for the Libertarian that *none* of these States have any rightful property, that the Ruritanian Government does not properly and justly own the entire land area of the country—the property should be owned by individual citizens, the State apparatus has then no title, no just claim. So if the Ruritanian State crosses the frontier and fights the Waldavian State, this does not make the Ruritanian State any more of an aggressor than the original Waldavian State. *Both* of them are aggressors over their subject populations. Considering that and the whole idea that every other government should rush in and defend Waldavia means that not only is every small *conflict* escalated to a global scale—it also means that every small *aggression* is maximized in the global scale. In other words, since all governments aggress against their citizens through taxes, through conscription, through mass murder called war, the more governments that enter into the picture—the more the United States, Britain or whatever rushes in to defend Waldavia—the more innocent civilians get killed, the more innocent people are forced to pay taxes, the more innocent people are conscripted. So the way to minimize aggression when you are dealing with states is to agitate and press for nobody to enter into any conflict at all—hopefully for no government to go to war with any other government—and if any government does go to war for the third, fourth and fifth party to stay the blazes out.

Apart from all this, the boundaries of each State—Waldavian, Ruritanian, American, French, British boundaries—since they are not justly owned by any sort of process of capital investment or homesteading or anything else—all state boundaries have always been the result of previous conquests—so in many cases the so-called aggressor state has a better claim than the so-called victim state. For example, suppose that Ruritania is "aggressing" and declares war on Waldavia and starts seizing the Northwestern part of Waldavia. Well, it's very possible that the Northwestern part of Waldavia is ethnically Ruritanian, had Ruritanian customs, and that 100 years ago, the Waldavian State had conquered it and now the Ruritanians were taking it back. This is a perfectly legitimate claim, so the point is, then, that all

interstate wars intensify aggression—maximize it—and that some wars are even more unjust than others. In other words, all government wars are unjust, although some governments have less unjust claims in the sense that they might have—well, let's put it this way—in the case of the Ruritanian-Waldavian thing when the Ruritanians are simply taking back ethnically Ruritanian territory and the Ruritanian masses were yearning to rejoin their homeland—then Libertarians, it seems to me, would say that that war would then be just if the following conditions were satisfied: (1) There were no taxes imposed; (2) No innocent civilians got killed; (3) Nobody got conscripted—in other words, it was a purely voluntary fight. Obviously to meet these conditions, it would be almost impossible but there are different gradations—you know real life wars, approaching this. A "just war" would be for all these conditions to be met.

**REASON:** Let me ask you, Murray, what is your view of the applicability of the concept of collective security to, say, a situation involving a private nongovernmental band of pirates that plunder and attack innocent victims?

**ROTHBARD:** Well I wouldn't call it collective security, I would call it—well, first of all, I don't like the word "collective" anyway. Collective implies some sort of nonexistent collectivity that acts—has a being and acts; only individuals exist, only individuals act. So that if private people get aggressed against by pirates I would certainly be in favor of and certainly support the right of these individual victims to defend themselves against piracy by banding together, or by hiring other agencies to defend themselves. I don't like to call that collective, because collective implies some sort of coercive totality.

**REASON:** Let's assume, then, you have some type of mutual defense pact entered into by private individuals to defend themselves against a band of private nongovernmental pirate marauders—let's say that it would be probable that there would be innocent victims who would be injured as a result of the defense tactics that were most appropriate to use in defending private interests. What would be your view on the propriety of such tactics being carried out?

**ROTHBARD:** I think—first, one of the points that I should have mentioned about wars, why I am opposed to all of them—is that in modern times the scale of weaponry that's used is escalated so that it's almost impossible *not* to murder innocent civilians. Part of the reason for this is not only the march of technology—the fact that if you use a bow and arrow

you can pinpoint it against the enemy army—you can pinpoint it at the retinue of a king; if you use H bombs or B-29s or whatever, of course, you can't pinpoint them to the warring soldiers and officers—you have to start mass murdering of civilians. There's another reason for this and that is that the State apparatus identifies itself—brings to itself so to speak—gathers to itself under its skirts the entire population of its territory—so that if you happen to live in France you as a French citizen, even though you might hate the war that France is conducting against Portugal or whatever, you are committed to it by the very nature of the state system—so that if the French Government goes to war with the Portuguese Government, the Portuguese Government might undoubtedly bomb, if they can, the French civilian population. So, in other words, the very nature of interstate war puts innocent civilians into great jeopardy, especially with modern technology.

However, if you didn't have state war, if we had simply private—if states were eliminated or if you are only talking about private marauders versus private defenders, then the situation completely changes. Then you don't only have one state and one geographical area secure in its home base, and the other state somewhere else in its geographical area on its home base. In other words, to put it bluntly, you are not going to have either the marauders or the defenders each bombing each other because they are only perhaps five blocks apart. So the result of this is that you only use H bomb and mass murder—commit genocide of an enemy—if they are way out there somewhere and you can't see them—if they are several thousand miles away. The beauty of non-state—interprivate, if you want to put it that way—warfare is that it has to be pinpointed—it has to be, in order not to commit suicide in the process—and so

that scale of weaponry has to be reduced say to machinegun level. In that situation, I don't see why civilians have to be injured at all. After all, look at private crime now: supposing somebody robs or somebody beats somebody over the head and steals a person's pocketbook and runs down the street. The police right now do not—at least I hope they don't—spray machinegun fire on the entire crowd in order to shoot down the criminal. The principle is that no innocent person can get killed and if the criminal escapes it's tough luck, because the most important principle—for the Libertarian and among the domestic police is not to injure—to use force against noncriminals. There's an ancient maxim—I forget who said it—that it's more important to let a hundred criminals escape than to injure one innocent person, so (1) I would be totally opposed to injuring any noncriminal, and (2) if you shift from state war—interstate warfare—down to private warfare, the likelihood of doing that—of pursuing this kind of Libertarian noninjuring of civilians—will be greatly increased.

**REASON:** Let me ask, Leonard, whether there are any wars in which the United States has been involved that you could justify in terms of the role that's been played by American forces.

**LIGGIO:** Yes there is only one war in which the United States has played a justifiable role and that was the Revolutionary War. The American Revolution was one of the most dramatic and important moments in world history because the American people rose up against the Government, overthrew the Government, established local parallel institutions, through the Committees of Correspondence, through the Revolutionary Sons of Liberty in which they carried out direct attacks on the tax structure; on the military structure, on the monopoly organs of British Imperialism and attempted to wrest back into their own hands the determination of their own affairs. The Revolutionary War was successful because the American people pursued an essentially Libertarian policy of struggle against the British Government including a great deal of guerrilla warfare, political activity, political struggle and as a result were able to achieve self-determination and independence—and to make that struggle a guiding star to the process of revolutionary change that began in the late 18th century to challenge the whole system of feudalism, statism, imperialism—and which is a process that has continued to the present day on the one hand, and is a process that through the 20th century, at least, has been the object of assault and attack by the American Government. In this situation, the American people have at times acquiesced in their Government's policy of aggression and other times there have been magnificent struggles against the activities of the American Government and intervening abroad.



*"There is only one war in which the United States has played a justifiable role  
and that was the Revolutionary War."*

**REASON:** Murray, do you care to comment on Leonard's view that the only war in which the United States has been involved which could be justified is the Revolutionary war?

**ROTHBARD:** Yes, I agree 100% with that! The difference between the Revolutionary War and an interstate war is that, in the first place, an interstate war is a war of one government against another—it's a war that aggresses against the innocent civilians of the opposite government, it's a war that increases taxes at home, and conscription usually, to pay for it. Revolutionary war is a war against the state apparatus, a war from below by the armed public—it doesn't have to injure innocent civilians, and it usually doesn't. It often does not involve taxes or conscription—if it does, it does so on a very small scale. The American revolutionary effort didn't have any taxation even on a state level for the first few years of the Revolutionary war. In other words, put it this way—when you have a Revolutionary war against the existing state apparatus—say the American people against the British Crown and their collaborationists at home—now called compradores—the guerrilla revolutionary effort can pinpoint their attacks against the state apparatus—you see, they do the pinpointing, and they *have* to do the pinpointing. Well they can do it and they have to do it—in other words, they don't spray innocent people with machineguns, they don't H-bomb if they have the H bomb, their object is to zap the forces of the existing government of the Crown—the Crown officers and so forth.

On the other hand, the reason why they don't injure civilians is usually not just from moral reasons, but from basic strategic ones—that is, that no Revolutionary, no people's war can succeed unless it has the broad support of the mass of the population. Mao tse Tung and Che Guevara, of course, enunciated this—the thing was phrased as "The guerrillas are to the people as fish is to water." But actually Charles Lee saw this much earlier—he was the brilliant Revolutionary theorist who was the second in command to George Washington for the first few years of the American Revolution. He was a British soldier of fortune and Libertarian and sort of wandered all over the world picking up military insights. As soon as the American revolution broke out Lee rushed to the United States to help out in the war effort, and was immediately made second in command and Lee set the pattern for the American victory, not Washington—well, I won't go into that, but Lee set the pattern by pointing out that the American Revolution could only succeed as a people's war from below—a guerrilla struggle, if you will—against the superior fire power of the British Government. The

Government's lacking the essential popular support, the guerrillas therefore *become* the people—the people become the guerrillas in the old battle ground of Lexington and Concord which victories were the first great American guerrilla action. The British, just as the Americans now in Vietnam, had very great difficulty distinguishing between the peasants and the guerrillas. They say they all look alike—well, they are alike, they are THEM. In other words, peasants in the daytime pick up the gun at night and pop the British soldiers, so—

**JOEY ROTHBARD:** Not the British soldiers.

**ROTHBARD:** Well, in the American Revolution, it was the British soldiers, in the Viet Nam war, it is the American soldiers, but the principle is the same. The interesting thing is that on the other hand, the counterrevolutionary forces, in other words, the Government battling against the Revolution has to do just the opposite: they have superior fire power for various reasons, they have the official army, but they don't have the support of the population—so in their kind of warfare, they *have* to amass genocidal terror against the civilian population, they try to break the morale of the civilians, try to cut their support off from the guerrillas and so forth. The Americans have done this with the infamous strategic hamlet policy in Viet Nam, herding the peasants into hamlets so that they couldn't support the guerrillas; the British did it in the Boer War in the early 20th century; the American Government did it in the Philippines in the early part of the 20th century; and I think the British would have done it in the Revolutionary war if they had had the resources to do so. The British actually carried on some of this, you know, though they had not carried counterrevolutionary warfare to its present height. But the principle is there so that if you have a revolution against the state apparatus, the revolutionary warfare—apart from the goals of the revolution or the counterrevolution—is almost necessarily Libertarian and the counterrevolutionary warfare is almost necessarily genocidal or anti-Libertarian.

**REASON:** Murray, how do you account for the reports of civilian atrocities committed by the Viet Cong and by the I.R.A. in Northern Ireland?

**ROTHBARD:** Well, the Viet Cong wipes out government tribal chiefs—who are appointed by the Government in Saigon—but not innocent civilians. The reports of Viet Cong atrocities in Hue were false—first, not as many civilians were killed as was claimed by the "kept" press. And most of the civilians who died were killed by American naval bombardment

when the Viet Cong took control of Hue. It wouldn't make any sense for the Viet Cong to kill innocent civilians.

In Northern Ireland, the I.R.A. on the whole has tried to pinpoint its targets. While they may have gotten a little careless, what I said before is basically still correct for the I.R.A. in the Catholic areas in Northern Ireland. The I.R.A. ordinarily will attack, say, only a post office, where British troops are located. The British, of course, rely on mass sweeps and other counterrevolutionary tactics in Catholic areas to get the I.R.A. leaders. I think the I.R.A. tends to be more terroristic in places like Belfast—in Protestant areas, where they don't have mass support.

**REASON:** Could you proceed, Murray, to state the basic elements of a proper Libertarian foreign policy?

**ROTHBARD:** Well, the basic elements of any Libertarian foreign policy for any government is to pressure the government to do nothing abroad, just to pack up shop and go home. General Smedely Butler, one of my great heroes, formerly of the Marine Corps, in the late 1930's proposed a constitutional amendment in *THE WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION*. His article was a sensation for awhile but of course the amendment never was adopted and has now been forgotten. But it was kind of a charming constitutional amendment—I recommend that everybody read it. In essence it says something like this: no American soldier shall be sent any place over two miles outside the American shores, no American plane should be sent outside an American boundary and no American ship can be sent outside. In other words, complete abstinence from any kind of American military intervention and political and economic intervention.

**REASON:** You would be referring to American government planes, I assume—what about the commercial flights?

**ROTHBARD:** Oh yes, you know, abstinence from government intervention. It was the idea of Isolationism. The sneer against Isolationism always was that Isolationists were parochial, narrowminded characters who don't know that there is a world out there and want to hide their heads in the sand. In fact it's the opposite—the true principle of Isolationism is that the *government* should be isolated, the government should do nothing abroad and people who trade, interchange, and engage in voluntary travel, migration and so forth should be allowed to peacefully do so. *The idea is to isolate the government, not to isolate the country.* There's another aspect, of course; this would apply to any government, but the thing is there is also an extra aspect—empirically it so happens that the American government since the days of Woodrow Wilson has been the main threat to the

peace of the world, the main imperialist, the main embarker on a policy of meddling in every conceivable country every place in the world to make sure their government shapes up properly. So that the policy of *American isolationism* is almost more important for Libertarian principle than any other country's isolationism.

**REASON:** There have been a number of Presidents that have been mentioned in the course of your statements—are there any American Presidents that you would single out as better than others, or Presidents that you regard as having been more or less in the Libertarian tradition?

**ROTHBARD:** Well I can't put the seal of approval on any American President fully, by the very nature of their office they begin to deteriorate—corruption takes place. Even Thomas Jefferson, one of my great heroes—Thomas Jefferson was a great theorist and a great advocate before he got in to the Presidency and after he got off the Presidency, but whilst he was in it he sloughed off a great deal. As a matter of fact, he paved the path for the War of 1812, unfortunately. So it's really a question of degree, of lesser evils here. I kind of have a fondness—well, I have a great fondness for Martin Van Buren. Probably the best American President was Martin Van Buren. He refused to intervene in the panic of 1837, and he tried desperately to institute a hard money policy to separate the banks completely from government. I admire Martin Van Buren. And I think Grover Cleveland's first administration has a lot to commend it—the second administration was already getting pretty imperialistic, and after Cleveland's first administration miasma sets in. I have a certain fondness for Warren Harding (1) because he wasn't around long enough to do much damage, and (2) because he did enunciate *laissez faire* principles—which Herbert Hoover was able to override, even when Harding was President. But outside of that the rest is chaos and disaster.

**REASON:** Was Harding involved at all in the growth of the federal reserve system—would you view him as being culpable in any respect as to the growth of Government intervention in monetary policy?

**ROTHBARD:** No he did not do very much. Wilson of course was the main culprit in the whole thing—he put in the federal reserve system. The big inflationary expansion in the 20's came with Calvin Coolidge. Harding did very little, I mean Harding did very little to roll back the federal system or anything like that. Harding spent his time playing poker, the only corruption taking place in the White House. It was kind of pleasant. I'm not saying he is a noble hero—a Libertarian hero—but at least he didn't advance the State any further.

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nothing abroad—just to pack up shop and go home."*

**REASON:** What about the role that was played by Calvin Coolidge—Silent Cal—could Coolidge be viewed as being one of the better figures or at least less damaging figures in American Presidents?

**ROTHBARD:** With Coolidge we get the statist corruption already. Of course in the true sense, it's not that Coolidge was so much active himself but Coolidge allowed Benjamin Strong—the Mephistophelean figure who was the head of the Federal Reserve Board—excuse me, head of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York—to run the Federal Reserve System as he saw fit, and Coolidge deliberately kept inflating the money supply and went on doing so. Strong's policy was expanding the money supply and jacking up the stock market. Every time the stock market would flag a little bit, Coolidge would issue a statement saying stock prices were too low and things like that. Ralph Robey, the laissez-faire economist, wrote an excellent article in the *ATLANTIC MONTHLY* in 1928 called "The Capeadors of Wall Street," showing how Coolidge and Secretary of the Treasury Mellon—every time the stock market would relax a little bit—used the function of the capeadors of the bull because they kept prodding the bull, "No, No, the stocks should go up further and America is in great shape," and so on. So Coolidge did not really snooze in the White House, I think that's an error. I think Harding snoozed.

**REASON:** What about Herbert Hoover? There are a lot of American conservatives who regard Hoover as one of the last bastions of a President who believed in limited Government. You've written, Murray, on Hoover and implicated Hoover as being responsible for the New Deal in many ways more than F.D.R. himself. Would you care to comment on this?

**ROTHBARD:** It's a great myth that Hoover is the great champion of laissez-faire and that Roosevelt was the great New Dealer. The myth was propounded both by the Hoover disciples and the Roosevelt disciples, each for their different reasons. Actually Hoover was the first great New Dealer—he was one of the great theorists, visionaries of the corporate state, of promoting cartelism, of promoting monopoly, and of promoting the idea of heavy public works programs, inflationary policies—and of promoting the idea that if depression should ever strike, the President immediately should step in and intervene, keep wages up, increase purchasing power, do everything that the New Deal eventually did. There's not a single act that Franklin Roosevelt did that Herbert Hoover did not also do before him. Everything from the farm price support program which Hoover originated, the keeping wages high, inflation, deficits, even the NRA

in embryo—although there he did not go that far. Hoover and Roosevelt were close friends, as a matter of fact, when they started out early in 1920. It was kind of, I think, characteristic—Hoover and Roosevelt—one of them was President, the other was Chairman of the Board, I forget which was which, of the American Construction Council, which was a trade association of the construction industry designed to monopolize—to restrict competition, keep up construction prices, limiting what they call unfair competition, and so forth. The idea was to have fair codes of practice—"fair codes" meaning, of course, they don't compete very much. Herbert Hoover was the originator of the idea of the codes, and when Franklin Roosevelt came in as President he put these codes in throughout industry and the NRA—the National Recovery Administration—so there was no real difference between Hoover and Roosevelt. Hoover was the progenitor of the thing.

What happened was just as with many revolutions—in the sense of radical changes in society—the founders of the revolution—you know, you find that events go past them. The onrush of collectivism—big business collectivism—of corporate statism, by 1932 in the business world and among intellectuals was so fast that it was too much for Hoover. Hoover wanted a sort of a gradual approach—Hoover liked at least the patina and rhetoric of voluntarism. This was being cast aside by Gerard Swope, the head of General Electric who introduced the so called Swope Plan, which was adopted by the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, saying, we want an outright imitation of the Fascist mob, we want complete cartelization of American industry, abolition of competition and so forth and so on. Hoover just couldn't take it and so Hoover balked at the last step. And so if you focus only on the last step, you can say Hoover is more for laissez-faire, but aside from that act, Hoover and Roosevelt would be very, very similar.

**REASON:** What about the campaign that was run by Roosevelt when he ran against Hoover in the 1932 Election—is it true that Roosevelt actually campaigned on a program of limited government and rolling back the Hoover intervention and going back to a balanced budget?

**ROTHBARD:** Yes. You see the Republican Party had been—really for 100 years or more—they had been the "big government" party of high tariff support, large government spending, high taxes and so forth. The Democratic Party had been roughly the party of—I wouldn't say laissez-faire, but minimal government, less government. This Party was more in



favor of free trade, in favor of low budgets and so forth. This was true in the 20's too, and Roosevelt ran on a typical Democratic platform. He attacked the big government of Herbert Hoover, he attacked the heavy spending, he promised to roll it back and so forth. Of course he was obviously insincere—as soon as he came into power he immediately did just the opposite. But see, this was a remnant of the old Democratic Party, the old "Cleveland," shall we say, Democratic Party which really stems way back from Jackson.

**REASON:** If we come up to more current times, could you indicate, Murray, what your views are pro and con as to the Nixon presidency from the Libertarian perspective.

**ROTHBARD:** Oh dear. Well, I don't see any pro in the Nixon Presidency. From the Libertarian perspective President Nixon, like Hoover, sometimes uses free market rhetoric. But in practice, like Hoover—more than Hoover—more like Franklin Roosevelt I would say—I would say he's given the biggest impetus that collectivism-statism has had in the United States since Franklin Roosevelt. If you look down a list of Nixon policies: the introduction of wage-price controls, which now looks to be almost permanent—which even Roosevelt would never dare to institute in peacetime—the family assistance program which is essentially a guaranteed annual income scheme which will be disastrous—which will have disastrous economic consequences—the loans for Lockheed and SST and so forth, which set the precedent for something more drastic to come—of a Government policy to underwrite any failure on the part of business—for any sort of losses, the Government will step in. Some political scientist described Fascism as a system whereby business reaps the profits and the taxpayers underwrite the losses, and we are again

getting very close to that kind of system. There is the permanentization of military spending and, looming on the horizon, there's imminent talk of National Health insurance and all the rest of it.

And in the foreign policy area, Nixon has been absolutely a disaster. He has been the acme of collective security. Every place in the world from Viet Nam, Ceylon and so forth, he's been a strategic disaster as well as a conventional disaster because he still has this patina of conservative rhetoric which makes the Conservatives follow him—most of them, with a few honorable exceptions, like sheep to the slaughter—and so he is able to get through Congress much more in the form of statist and socialist policies than an outright socialistic Democrat would. As a matter of fact when he got into office Daniel Moynihan, as White House adviser, told Nixon he had a great opportunity to be an American Disraeli—in other words, he had a great opportunity to push through collectivist programs under guise of a conservative rhetoric and a conservative patina, which of course is what Disraeli had done. I think Nixon has been following that course.

**REASON:** How would you assess, Murray, the appointments that Nixon has made, say, to the United States Supreme Court, to the regulatory commissions, to the NLRB?

**ROTHBARD:** I haven't followed the appointments in detail except that it seems that, on balance, there's been an increase in statism in the sense that concern for civil liberty seems to be weakened—you know, concerning wiretapping, rights-of-the-accused sort of thing. I think Conservatives are happy with Nixon's judicial appointments because of the strong law and order connotation. On the other hand, law and order generally means, in this context, cracking down on the rights of accused people, allowing the police to beat up citizens and so forth—so there again you have an increase in statism.

**REASON:** The *WALL STREET JOURNAL* on April 24, 1972, had a front page story detailing Nixon's present economic thinking and the article stated that Nixon was presently entertaining economic ideas that were perhaps even more revolutionary than Franklin Roosevelt in terms of government participation in private enterprise and government cartels, with government taking a major role in terms of business relations. Do you have any information as far as Nixon's ideas in this direction today?

**ROTHBARD:** I can only repeat what I said before about that. I don't know whose economic advice he's really taking as far as that goes. Before August 15, 1971, all the economic advisers were dead set against price controls and he opposed them—and which person persuaded him or whether he himself did it is

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hard to tell. Obviously the economic thrust of his position is leaning toward increasing statism.

**REASON:** What about in terms of foreign policy with respect specifically, Murray, to such items as the thawing of the Cold War, with respect to relations with Soviet Russia and Communist China—do you have any comments on that?

**ROTHBARD:** Well, I don't think the trips which Nixon took to China and Russia had any substantial effect. Esthetically, they were revolting as far as I am concerned—you know, with Nixon praising the great march forward of the Chinese people and all that sort of stuff. And I don't see anything concrete coming out of them. I'm happy that there does not seem to be any imminent war between us and Russia and China. There was a certain truth in the fact that in our quest to keep down Communist-led movements throughout the world, the Nixon and previous administrations have looked for some outside influence. One of the keys to American foreign policy during the Cold War has been that they are always searching for some outside puppet master—you know, there is never any indigenous population to worry about. If the Ruritanian Communists start stirring things up, it must be because Hanoi is directing them, or because China is directing them, or because Russia is directing them—because we can never conceive that the native population might have a real grievance—a real gripe—and that the gripe is being stressed through the Communist parties. So we are always looking for some sort of Fu Man Chu character who is somehow directing everything and pushing pins in a Board Room.

I think part of the reason for the current rapprochement with Russia and China is that we are desperately looking for them to try to tell the Vietnamese to lay low, to give up or to surrender in some way. I don't think they are going to succeed—for one reason, because Russia used to have the power to do this back in the Stalin days, and they don't have it any longer. One of the reasons they don't have it any longer is because the indigenous Communist Party has got burned so often by the orders and the compromises they undertook—they won't listen any more. I mean, Ho Chi Minh was betrayed three times by both America and Russia. In 1945, after the war was over, Ho Chi Minh should, by any kind of political standard, have taken over the Government. He was the obvious leader of the country, he had led the Resistance forces against the Japanese, he was supported by the Americans. Then he was induced by Russia to allow the French to come back supposedly temporarily—excuse me, I think it was the British to

come back temporarily—and enter Vietnam. The British called the French back and the French turned upon Ho Chi Minh and slaughtered the Communist forces and they went up into the hills and started the great liberation struggle. Yes, the same thing happened in 1954 of course with the Geneva agreements, when Russia induced Ho Chi Minh to abide by the Geneva agreements—they said, "Well, you can trust the United States, you will have elections in two years and the country will be unified." As a result of that, Ho Chi Minh pulled his forces out of the South—for he had conquered most of the South—pulled his forces up across the parallel up in North Vietnam—and then we betrayed him again, so they are not going to listen any more. So I think that is a typical great power ploy which this time is not going to work.

**REASON:** Let me just ask a few more questions just to bring us up-to-date on the current political scene. What do you think is the most effective political strategy for the Libertarians today?

**ROTHBARD:** I mean, there's no high road to strategy. Strategy is an art. As the Marxists would say, we should be "doctrinaire in principle and flexible in strategy and tactics." There's no scientific royal road to know exactly what to do, but you can say—there are masses of people who are discontented, and properly so, with the breakdown of liberalism, with the crisis of the cities, with the crisis of high taxes, with inflation, with the permanent war in Vietnam—we can agitate against all these things and unite with the groups fighting these things, and on that basis also try to oppose these policies. I don't know what really could be said more than that except that we should try to advance the cause as much as possible in whatever areas we can.

**REASON:** Given the prospect of a Nixon-McGovern race, what do you think the Libertarians ought to do?

**ROTHBARD:** That's a very difficult question because there are Libertarians on every side of us. There are Libertarians in favor of not voting at all, there are Libertarians in favor of Nixon, in favor of McGovern and those in favor, you know, of putting your own name on the ballot, and there is a Libertarian Party candidate. I'm not very happy with any of these tactics, all of them seem to me so bad that it's difficult to choose—I don't think there's any firm choice that can be made. I think, from my own personal position—I think foreign policy is paramount—I think McGovern's foreign policy would be better than Nixon's, at least he'd get us out of the war in Vietnam and Indo China, reduce the military

spending and the whole military thrust so I suppose I might have to choose McGovern over Nixon—although it would be done with an enormous amount of pain for a while because McGovern's economics is horrendous. And the only thing we could then hope for is an extreme Right Wing Congress, which would block every conceivable domestic measure that the Government ever introduced. I don't know if that's likely to happen, but it's a choice of a great deal of evils there.

**REASON:** To the extent that a Republican President such as Nixon would be effective in silencing what might be expected to be the normal Republican opposition to interventionist governmental programs, do you think this would be a reason to oppose Nixon for re-election?

**ROTHBARD:** Yes, I think it would be a very good reason because, as you say—for McGovern's economic policies—if McGovern were in—the current Republicans who were backing very similar economic policies because Nixon is their President would then become opponents of it, and all of the Press would do the same thing. There would be a lot more opposition. McGovern couldn't get away with the stuff that Nixon's getting away with. I think that's very true. Also there's the question of the policy of simply kicking out the bad guy—I mean punishing the guy at least who's in power.

**REASON:** Well to follow up on that theme, Murray, what do you think about the notion that an incumbent politician should not be re-elected to office—that Libertarians should not vote for an incumbent for re-election unless he actually proves himself and demonstrates that he has done a fairly decent job?

**ROTHBARD:** Yes, I think other things being equal the incumbent should be punished for his sins, which are usually pretty great. Of course other things could outweigh that—but other things being equal, well whatever existing politician there is, he should be kicked out.

**REASON:** Specifically, Murray, what about the Libertarian Party and your view of the Hospers candidacy. Are you generally in favor of his candidacy or are you opposed to it?

**ROTHBARD:** I am opposed to the Libertarian Party candidacy for one reason: because I think it's ridiculous for 200 to 300 whatever people to run a candidate for the Presidency. Of course he is not going to win, nobody expects that. The educational value in setting forth Libertarian programs will be offset gravely by the sense of the public realizing it's a hopeless candidacy and therefore wouldn't take it seriously. I mean the Socialist Labor party, for

example, a party which constantly runs people for Presidency since 18-whatever it is, and every year diligently puts up their Presidential candidate and Vice Presidential candidate and whatever—and they campaign very hard and they accomplish nothing because everybody considers it's a bunch of very small minority kooky people who obviously couldn't win a Presidency. I think, however, the educational value would be negative and it would hold the Libertarian principles up to certain ridicule because of that.

On a local level, however, I think there would be some use for a Libertarian party. I don't know there, it's a question of tactics, whether or not—I think it should be, you know, a strong local-level party. If you have, for example, an assembly district or a Congressional district where the Libertarians could command 5 or 10% of the vote, then I think it would be useful, have an educational value, the public would be impressed. For example, in New York State there is a Conservative party and a Liberal party, neither of which—of course the Conservative party has already elected a Senator—neither of which win too much, but are strong enough to have a balance of power and so they are taken seriously and they have a great educational value. So I don't like to see tiny parties—I'm not against third parties of that sort, but I'm afraid we are parting with a certain amount of strength.

**REASON:** Of course, not very long ago the McGovern candidacy was regarded as something that was very futile in face of the Muskie front-running campaign and the Wallace candidacy in many respects has been basically a protest movement. In this context, Murray, do you think that the educational value of running a Presidential candidate on the Libertarian party ticket might be something—could evolve—could become much more significant, even though right now it may look much more dim?

**ROTHBARD:** Well, it could eventually, but I don't think for the foreseeable future. This would be possible, but let's not forget that the McGovern-Wallace phenomena takes place within the major parties. I'm not very friendly with the major parties system, but I think we have to be realistic in not really founding any kind of a major Libertarian party effort until we are strong enough to have some sort of impact, and then you can flower and flourish from there.

**REASON:** Given the fact that the Libertarian party appears to be a reality—at least there are certain Libertarians who are committed to the idea of going forward and running a candidate for President—what's your response to the emergence of the Libertarian party and what would you recommend Libertarians to do in November given a choice say

between Nixon and McGovern and John Hospers?

ROTHBARD: That's a difficult question, I don't know if John Hospers would be on the ballot in very many states. I mean it wouldn't really be a choice since Hospers is not a credible candidate—since he has no chance of winning whatsoever, the real choice would be between McGovern and Nixon. Whether they should vote for Hospers or not in some sort of significant protest—I'm not sure, because I think in the present state of affairs if we get 900 people voting for Hospers throughout the country it's going to make the whole movement look ridiculous. For one thing, practically, there are a lot of Libertarians who are against voting at all, they have a principle against voting. I don't agree with that but I mean that a lot of them don't vote at all for other reasons, so that the people who will vote for Libertarian—for Hospers for President—will be much, much smaller than the total amount of Libertarian sentiment, so I think I would discourage the idea of the Presidential candidacy.

REASON: Let me ask one concluding question, Murray, what do you think of *REASON* magazine?

ROTHBARD: It's the best regularly appearing magazine in the Libertarian movement.

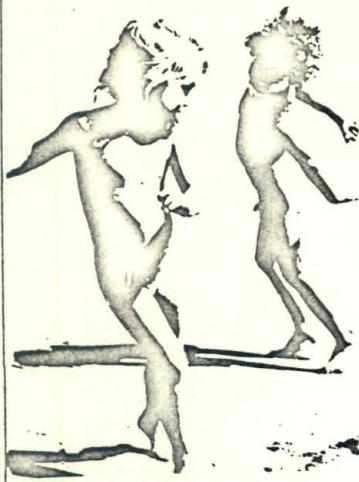
REASON: And may I ask Leonard Liggio one parting question. What do you think of *REASON* magazine?



LIGGIO: I think *REASON* magazine has some of the most thoughtful and well-researched articles dealing with concrete and practical matters that affect Libertarians and is a major contribution to raising consciousness of Libertarians in America.

REASON: That was so good I'm inclined to ask you some more questions. But we'll conclude for now. Thank you. ☐

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